

II. Remarks

Claims 1-10 were pending in this application. Claims 1-5 are rejected and claims 6-10 are objected to. The present amendment amends claims 1 and 5-7 to more particularly point out and clarify Applicants' invention. No new matter has been added by the present amendment. After this amendment, claims 1-10 will be pending.

Reconsideration of the application in view of the following remarks is respectfully requested.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 102

Claims 1-3 and 5 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 6,139,051, issued to Fujita ("Fujita"). Applicants respectfully submit that the rejections of claims 1-3 and 5 are traversed.

Claim 1 recites that the steering wheel comprises a frame and an outer skin that at least partially covers the frame. Each of the mounting elements are connected to the steering wheel and have a flange that lies over top of the outer skin of the steering wheel to expose the portion of each of the mounting elements to outside the steering wheel. The periphery of the air-bag unit defines a substantially controlled gap with the flange of each of the mounting elements. Support for these amendments may be found in Applicants' application at paragraphs [0022], [0023], [0027] and [0038] and Figures 1-4.

Fujita discloses a steering wheel W1 comprising an annular portion R, a boss portion B, located in the center of the annular portion R, and 3 spokes

S connecting the annular portion R with the boss portion B. The steering wheel W1 is composed of a steering wheel main body 21, an airbag system 30, and at least one horn-switching mechanism 40. The steering wheel main body 21 has a metal core 22 with core portions 23 and 25, which are covered by a layer of synthetic resin 26. The airbag system 30 is located on top of the boss portion B and has a top pad 34 made of synthetic resin which covers the airbag 30 and forms a continuous external surface with the layer of synthetic resin 26. *Fujita* at Col. 4, lines 28-50 and Col. 5, lines 3-16 and Figure 2. A support plate 42 is positioned underneath the steering wheel's continuous external surface and is mounted to the core portion 25 at a left spoke portion metal core 25L and a right spoke portion metal core 25R. The support plate 42 mounts the airbag 30 to the steering wheel body 21. The support plate 42 includes mounting portions 44a and 44b. *Id.* at Col. 6, lines 3-18. Notably, the mounting portions 44a and 44b are completely covered within the steering wheel underneath the top pad 34 and are not exposed to outside the steering wheel.

This is unlike Applicants' invention as recited in claim 1, where each of the mounting elements has a flange that lies over top of the outer skin of the steering wheel to expose the flange to outside the steering wheel. In that *Fujita* lacks the noted elements of claim 1, the rejection based thereon should be withdrawn. Accordingly, Applicants believe claim 1 and its dependent claims 2-3 and 5 are in a condition for allowance.

Rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claim 4 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Fujita in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,600,114, issued to Kikuta ("Kikuta"). Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of claim 4 is traversed.

Since claim 4 depends on claim 1 and since Kikuta fails to disclose mounting elements with flanges that lie over top of the outer skin of the steering wheel to expose the flanges to outside the steering wheel, Fujita and Kikuta cannot render the claim of the present invention as obvious. The rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) is therefore improper and should be withdrawn.

Allowable Subject Matter

Claims 6-10 were indicated as being allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants have rewritten claims 6 and 7 to include the limitations of claims 1 and 5. Claims 8-10 depend from claim 7 and are allowable therewith.

Conclusion

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the present form of the claims are patentably distinguishable over the art of record and that this application is now in condition for allowance. Such action is requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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